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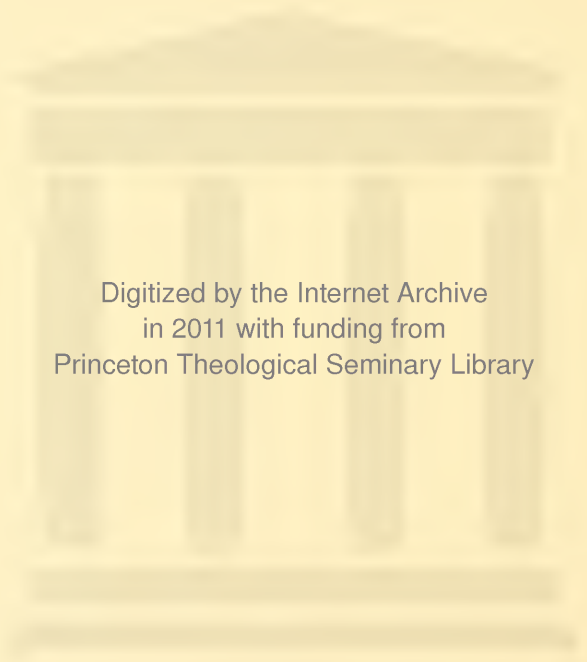


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SERIOUS and FREE
THOUGHTS
ON THE
PRESENT STATE
OF THE
CHURCH,
AND OF
RELIGION;

Humbly addressed
To the Right Reverend
The BISHOP of * * * * *

Micaiah Towgood

By a CHRISTIAN.

— *Can ye not discern the Signs of the Times !* Mat. xvi. 3.

L O N D O N :

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SERIOUS and FREE
THOUGHTS, &c.

MY LORD,



T is a very dark, but a just Picture of the Face of Things around us, which a great *Prelate* [a] has lately drawn, who thus paints and laments the Completion of the present Times.

“ An open Disregard to *Religion* is become, through a Variety of unhappy Causes,
“ the distinguishing Character of the present
“ Age. This Evil is grown to a great Height
“ in the Metropolis of the Nation ; is daily
“ spreading through every Part of it ; bringing in such Dissoluteness and Contempt of
“ Principle in the higher Part of the World,

A 2

“ and

[a] Bishop of *Oxford's* Charge to his Clergy : p. 4, 5, 6.

“ and such profligate Intemperance and Fear-
 “ lessness of committing Crimes in the lower,
 “ as must, if this Torrent of Impiety stop
 “ not, become absolutely fatal : And G O D
 “ knows, far from stopping, it receives,
 “ through the ill Designs of some, and the
 “ Inconsiderateness of others, continual In-
 “ crease.

“ *Christianity* is now ridiculed and railed
 “ at with very little Reserve ; and the *Teach-*
 “ *ers* of it without any at all. — Disregard
 “ to public Worship and Instruction hath in-
 “ creased : Many are grown prejudiced a-
 “ gainst *Religion* ; many more indifferent
 “ about it. The Emissaries of the Church
 “ of *Rome* have begun to reap great Harvests
 “ in the Field, which hath thus been pre-
 “ pared for them.

“ This melancholly State of Things (his
 “ Lordship proceeds) calls loudly upon us
 “ (the *Clergy*) to correct our Mistakes ; to
 “ supply our Deficiencies ; and earnestly
 “ to beg of G O D, that he would direct
 “ the Hearts of those who preside over
 “ the public Welfare, and humbly to
 “ represent to them, on all fit Occasions,
 “ the declining State of Religion, and the
 “ Impor-

“ Importance and the Means of Preserving
 “ it. These Things are unquestionable
 “ Duties.—”

It is from a deep Sense of this Duty, my Lord, that I presume thus to address your Lordship; and humbly to suggest some *Occasions* of this spreading Evil, which seem not to have been so thoroughly and so seriously adverted to, as their Importance deserves. To know the Cause of a Disease, in the Body politic as well as natural, is the first Step to its Cure. The Causes of the present prevailing *Scepticism* are, no Doubt, complicated and various. The Strictness of the *Christian* Morals, and the Restraint which the *Gospel* lays upon the corrupt Appetites of Men, is, probably, a chief Cause of some Men's violent Opposition to it. But there are, my Lord, I apprehend, a Variety of inferior Causes, *Offences* the Gospel calls them, which co-operate and help it on; *Offences*, which confirm greatly Men's Prejudices against CHRISTIANITY; and which strongly tempt, and seem to warrant, their treating Things reputed Sacred with much Drollery and Ridicule; *Offences*, which are found, not in it's Professors only, but in
 those

those who are set for it's Propagation and Defence.

May I be permitted, my Lord, with the Freedom of a *Christian*, to expostulate on this Subject? Things evidently seem to draw, as his Lordship above observes, to a dangerous and important *Crisis*. When the Exigency of Affairs presses, a Liberty of Speech may with some Confidence be claimed. Will your Lordship then indulge me, whilst with no greater Freedom than the great Danger of the Case seems plainly to require, I endeavour to point out *some Things*, which hang as a portentous Weight upon the Cause of CHRISTIANITY, and are some of the *fatal Stones*, at which the *Scepticks* of the present Age stumble, dangerously stumble, and sometimes fall. *It is impossible*, we are told, *but Offences will come*: but *Woe to that Man*, Woe to that Church, *by whom the Offence cometh*!

Great, it must be owned, is the Felicity of this Nation in having so many of it's established Clergy, whose Learning and whose Lives reflect Honour on their Profession, and whose Writings have blest'd the World with some of the noblest Defences of Virtue and Religion

Religion. But, as Matters are at present *constituted*, are there not some Things, which greatly abate the Force of the strongest Arguments they offer ? Some *Prejudices*, which too naturally and too justly arise, of which disaffected Minds avail themselves not a little in their Opposition to CHRISTIANITY ?

The *first* unhappy Cause of the Growth of *Infidelity*, which I beg leave to mention, is a general Apprehension that the Clergy themselves are not thoroughly persuaded of the Truth and Importance of the *Christian Religion*, inasmuch as they solemnly subscribe *Articles*, which they do not *really believe*; and declare publicly, in GOD'S Presence, their *unfeigned Assent and Consent* to Forms, in Divine Worship, which they *highly disapprove*; perhaps, heartily condemn.

If this Apprehension, my Lord, appears to be well founded: if there is good Reason to think, that your Lordships, the *Bishops*, do rigorously impose, and that the Clergy subscribe, *Articles of Religion* which neither *you*, nor *they*, do really believe; And that, in the most solemn Manner, your Lordships require, and they readily give, *unfeigned Assent and Consent* to certain Matters and Forms,
which,

which, at the same Time, *you both* judge to be highly censurable and wrong——What will, my Lord, what must a doubting Enquirer naturally conclude ; but, that the Profession of *Christianity* is all Artifice and Pretence ! That there is no such Thing as Conscience, Integrity, or Faith in Transactions, relating to *ecclesiastical* Concerns ! That the Terrors, which the *Gospel* threatens to the Hypocrite and Unbeliever, are known, by those who preach them, to be all but an empty Phantom ; as are the Rewards also, which it promises to those who are courageous to confess and avow the Truth ! [b]

The

[b] Bishop *Burnet* says — “ He is forced to declare :
 “ That having had much free Conversation with many
 “ who have been fatally corrupted with *atheistic* and *infidel*
 “ Principles ; they have very often own'd to him,
 “ that Nothing so much promoted this in them as the
 “ very bad Opinion which they took up, of all Clergy-
 “ men of all Sides.”

“ That they did not see in them that Contempt of the
 “ World —that Diligence and Earnestness with Relation
 “ to the great Truths of the *Christian Religion*, which
 “ they reckoned they would most certainly have, if they
 “ themselves *firmly believed* it. They therefore concluded ;
 “ that those whose Business it was more strictly to en-
 “ quire into the Truth of their Religion, knew that
 “ it was not so certain, as they themselves, for other
 “ Ends,

The *Articles of Religion*, which your Lordships oblige every *Clergyman* to subscribe, and which every *Clergyman* does with great Solemnity subscribe, it is notorious to the whole World are strongly, what is called, *Trinitarian* and *Calvinistic* : little less notorious is it, that the *Clergy* are, generally, gone far from the *religious Sentiments* which the Articles express, and are many of them either *Unitarian* or *Arminian*. What, then, can any serious impartial Spectator judge ; when Gentlemen in the *Unitarian* Scheme subscribe solemnly, in GOD'S Presence (i. e. calling upon HIM to witness to the *Sincerity* and *Truth* with which they subscribe) the *First*, the *Second*, and the *Eighth* Articles of the Church, which strongly assert — *That there is but ONE living and true GOD — And in the UNITY of this GODHEAD, there be THREE PERSONS OF ONE SUBSTANCE, POWER AND ETERNITY, the Father, Son and*

B *Holy*

“ Ends, endeavoured to make the World believe it was :
 “ And that though, for the carrying on their own *Au-*
 “ *thority* or *Fortunes*, which in one Word they called
 “ their *Trade*, they seemed very positive in affirming
 “ the Truth of their *Doctrine*, yet they in their own
 “ Hearts did *not believe* it, since they lived so little suita-
 “ ble to it.” *Pastoral Care, Preface ;* pag. 15, 16.

Holy Ghost. That the SON is THE VERY and ETERNAL GOD of ONE SUBSTANCE with the FATHER — And that the Creed of Athanasius ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for it may be proved by most certain Warrants of holy Scripture?

In like Manner the Gentlemen who favour what is called the *Arminian* Scheme, and reject the *Calvinistic*, stand forth before GOD, and subscribe, and declare that *they do it willingly and ex animo* (i. e. sincerely and from their Heart,) the *Ninth, Thirteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth* Articles, as likewise the *Twentieth*, which expressly affirm — *That ORIGINAL, or BIRTH-SIN is the Fault or Corruption of the Nature of every Man, that is naturally ingendred of the Offspring of Adam; and in every Person born into this World it DESERVETH GOD'S WRATH and DAMNATION. — That Works done before the Grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasing to GOD, forasmuch as they spring not of Faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make Men meet to receive Grace; yea,—we doubt not but they have the Nature of Sin. — That PREDESTINATION to Life is the everlasting Purpose of GOD, whereby (before*

fore the Foundation of the World) he hath constantly decreed by his Counsel, secret to us, to deliver from Curse and Damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of Mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting Salvation, as Vessels made to Honour. And as the godly Consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable Comfort to godly Persons; so for curious and carnal Persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their Eyes the Sentence of GOD's Predestination, is a most dangerous Downfal, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into Desperation, or into Wretchedness of most unclean Living.

They also are to be held accursed, who presume to say, that every Man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his Life according to that Law, and the Light of Nature. — The Church hath Power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and Authority in Controversies of Faith.

THESE, my Lord, are *Articles*, which the Church represents as the plain and the undoubted Doctrines of Christianity. This

it declares to be the *true Gospel* of Jesus Christ: And *these* it obliges every one of its Ministers to subscribe with his Hand, in the Presence of *Almighty* GOD, and solemnly to declare, *that he believes them to be agreeable to the Word of* GOD [c], before he is admitted to officiate in that Character.

Now if the Generality of the *Clergy* do in their Consciences believe this (in some one, at least, or more Points) to be a very *wrong* Representation of the Doctrines of CHRISTIANITY; a Representation *injurious* to the Perfections of GOD; very highly dishonourable and repugnant to the *Gospel*-Scheme; but do nevertheless consent thus solemnly to *subscribe* the Articles above-mentioned, and to *declare them agreeable to the Scriptures*.——What, my Lord, I again ask, with great Astonishment and Concern, will, not only sagacious *Deists*, but every attentive Person, with good reason presume—But that *Honesty* and *Truth* are fled from the Earth: at least, that the *Church* is no more the sacred Temple, where these heavenly Guests dwell! What, but that *the Contempt of Principle* complained of as

[c] Canon. XXXVI.

brought

brought into the higher Part of the World, reigns not only there; but that it spreads, and reigns terribly in another Order of Men; an Order, whose chief Design, and whose only Glory it is, to be *Patterns*, as well as *Preachers* of uncorrupted Faith and Integrity amongst Men: who, no farther than they *act up* to this their primitive Design, are of any Benefit to Society; and in what Measure they *counteract* it, by shewing a *Contempt of Principle*, and exhibiting *Patterns of Double-dealing and Insincerity* to the World, they become of all Men the most unworthy: and instead of meriting the Esteem, deserve nought but the Contempt and the Indignation of Society. If the *Salt bath lost its Saltness*, the supreme Judge hath expressly said, relating to this very Point, *it is cast out to the Dunghil, and trodden under Foot*.

Original Sin, one of the most learned of our present *Bishops* [d] hath frankly declared “ to be a *Contradiction in Terms*: For as “ the Word *Sin* implies an Act of the “ Will, so the Word *Original* implies the “ direct contrary; and supposes the criminal

[d] *Thoughts on Self-Love, Innate Ideas, &c.* p. 17.

“ minal Act to have been committed by *another*
 “ *Person*, to which Act that Person, to whom
 “ the Sin is imputed, neither contributed by
 “ Thought, Word, or Deed.”

But, besides the *Contradiction in Terms*, which the learned Bishop asserts, to affirm, my Lord, as the *Article* is supposed to do, that every Member of the human Race, upon the Account of *Adam's Sin* doth really *merit* GOD's *Wrath and Damnation*: that is to say, that *Infants* are no sooner born than they become just Objects of GOD's heavy Anger, and *deserve to be DAMNED: to be DAMNED* for *an Act* in which they had not the least Share; An Act committed *Six Thousand Years* before they came into Being, — That the all-perfect and blessed GOD is angry, even to *Wrath*, with the Work of his own Hands, who never have done, were never capable of doing the least Thing to *offend* Him — This, my Lord, will be pronounced a Doctrine so abhorrent to Nature, to Justice, to Truth, (may it not be said so *impious* and *profane*) that it is candidly presumed, that there is not one sensible and sober *Clergyman* in the Kingdom that *believes it*: And yet, astonishing to consider! there
 is

is not one *Clergyman* in the Kingdom, but hath solemnly *subscribed* it: Not one *Bishop* in the Kingdom, but absolutely insists upon it, as an *indispensible* Condition of Admission to the *Christian* Ministry; even the learned *Bishops* not excepted, who are presumed to know and to acknowledge it to be a *Contradiction in Terms*.

Is there any Virtue, my Lord, or Honour; any Prudence or Discretion in such Procedure as this? Does it not directly tend to violate and lay Waste the Conscience; to throw down every Fence of Integrity and Truth; to open a Way for all Manner of Licentiousness both of Principle and of Practice, to break in like a Deluge, and to sweep from Society all Distinction betwixt Right and Wrong? For, why, it may be justly asked, should it be accounted more criminal to equivocate and collude on the *Exchange*, than in the *Church*? Yea, why more atrocious to kiss the Book in a *Civil Court* in Attestation to a Fact, which I believe not to be true; than to subscribe before GOD *Articles of Religion*, which I believe to be false? To me, my Lord, I profess solemnly, the Actions appear much the same in a moral Estimation; and

and *False-swearing* in the State seems near as reconcileable to Honesty and Truth, as fallacious and insincere *subscribing* in the Church.

There are a Variety of evasive Shifts, I know, of mental Reservations and forced Explications, by which Gentlemen endeavour to soften and extenuate their Conduct in this Matter : but if weighed in an impartial Balance, these will be found to be of a Nature unspeakably detrimental, and even destructive, to Society ; tending utterly to defeat the Use of *Language* amongst Men ; to confound Sentiments and Ideas ; to banish all Precision and indeed all Meaning, from Words ; and to bring in everlasting Darkness and Ambiguity in their stead. In short, they are *such*, as if any Man should presume to use in *commercial* or *civil* Life, would he not for ever forfeit his Honour upon the *Exchange*, or in a *Court of Justice* ; rouse a general Indignation ; and deliver up his Character to lasting Infamy and Reproach ?

There are, my Lord, I apprehend, no Subterfuges or Softenings, by which an *Arian* can subscribe the Doctrines, and the Curse, of *Athanasius's* Creed ; or an *Arminian* the Article of *Original Sin* ; and declare solemnly

ly that he believes them *to be agreeable to the Word of GOD*; but what would in like Manner justify him, were a good Revenue annex'd, in subscribing also this *Fortieth Article*, Viz, *That there is but one GOD, and that Mahommed is his Prophet*: Yea, but what would justify him in eluding the strictest Examination in a Court of Justice *upon Oath*, and in disguising or concealing the Truth in a Cause of the greatest Moment in *Westminster Hall*.

And is not this to give *Occasion* to those who are ready enough to seek *Occasion*, not only to *disbelieve*, but to *reproach* and *vilify* our most holy RELIGION? Is it strange, if sagacious *Deists* ridicule the *Christian Priesthood*; insult a Character and an Office so surreptitiously obtained; and treat all their pretended Zeal about *Doctrines* and *Truth* as most nauseous Grimace! The Temptation is exceeding strong: and no Wonder it has had a very powerful Effect.

And here, my Lord, might I be indulged, I would beg Leave for a Remark on the extreme *Vanity* and *Inutility*, not to say the prolific *Mischief*, of thus demanding *Subscriptions* to human Articles and Forms:

And to exprefs Astonishment, that a Measure so palpably absurd should have gained for so long a time so deep a Footing in the Church.

The *Holy Scriptures* your Lordship, and all Protestant Divines acknowledge to be a *Perfect Rule of Faith*: In them all needful and important Doctrines are *so plainly* revealed, in *Words* dictated by the HOLY GHOST, that no *sincere* Person can possibly mistake concerning them, so as dangerously to err. Subscription, therefore, to these *Scriptures* is all that the Interest of *Truth* and of *Religion* doth really require. Now, should any Man upon Earth, or any Body of Men, take upon them to draw up Articles and Formula's of Faith, in Words *different* from the holy Scriptures, and to propose them as a *Rule of Faith* or a *Test of Truth* to others; what, my Lord, is the real Nature, or the proper Language of such an Action? Is it not plainly this; that he thinks himself able to define the Doctrines of *Revelation* in apter and more proper Terms than those of the *Holy Ghost*? Does he not in Effect say, that the great Truths of Religion, as they stand revealed in the *Scriptures* (in Words of which not *Man's Wisdom*, but which the
Wisdom

Wisdom of GOD dictated) are not so distinctly and clearly expressed as *Man's Wisdom*, (yea, as *his own Wisdom*) is able to express them? And is not this, my Lord, presumptuously to set himself up as a *Corrector* of the HOLY GHOST? to declare himself capable of *mending* the Revelation? and to profess himself *authorised* to dictate to the Faith of others, and to interpret the Scriptures for them?

Will it be said, — But crafty and corrupt Men pervert the Words of the *Holy Ghost*, and screen gross and dangerous Errors under scriptural Forms. Let it be said: And will not crafty and corrupt Men as easily pervert, and as lightly violate and break through all the Articles and Forms which *human Skill* can devise, or *human Prudence* prescribe? Does not the plainest Reason and Nature of the Thing speak, that thus it will be? Has not the Experience of *Fourteen Hundred* Years put it beyond all Doubt? Will any Articles or Forms of Doctrine prove a Fence against a Man of an insincere and corrupt Heart, or keep him out of the Church? No: He will ever swim with the stream; he will declare or subscribe any

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Thing,

Thing, as his worldly Interest directs. No, my Lord, it is Men of *Virtue* and *Integrity* only, your Lordship well knows, that can possibly be affected here : it is Men of *Principle* and *Conscience* only, that these *Subscriptions* are ever capable of keeping out of the Church : So that, if rightly considered, it is not in their Nature to be the least Guard against *Error*, nor the least Security to *Truth*. And when withal it is remembred, how in all Ages of the Church they have been most mischievously employed by the several Parties of *Christians* as they alternately prevailed ! What Wrecks they have made of Conscience ! What Sacrifices of Integrity to human Ignorance and Pride ! What Engines they have proved in the Hands of the *Rulers of the Darknes of this World* to torture and oppress good Men, and to exalt and aggrandize the Bad ! — Scarce any Thing can be more amazing than that a Measure so notoriously preposterous and absurd ; a Measure so directly tending to bring *Corruption* into the Church, and to keep *Integrity* and *Conscience* out ; should ever have been patronized, and even vehemently urged, by Men, unquestionably both wise and good.

What

What has been above suggested with Reference to *Subscriptions* to Articles of Religion, is it not, my Lord, in great Measure applicable to the Declaration of *unfeigned Assent and Consent to ALL and EVERY THING contained and prescribed in and by the Book of Common-Prayer*, which every Clergyman is obliged, in the most solemn Manner, to make! That there are a Variety of Things *contained* in that Book, which a great Number of the *Clergy*, of distinguished Virtue and Sense, consider as highly censurable, and wish earnestly to have reformed, your Lordship, it is presumed, and the World cannot but know. [e]

But

[e] The *Order* for Reading in public Worship the apocryphal Romances of *Tobit*, *Bell and the Dragon* — Sponsors introduced to the *Exclusion* of the Parents — The *Questions* put to the Infant, and the *Answers* expected from it, in the Office of Baptism — The *authoritative* Absolution and Forgiveness of *all Sin*, directed to be pronounced in the Visitation of the Sick. — The Expressions of strong Hope of the Happiness after Death of some of the vilest of Men in the Office for Burial — The Creed called *Athanasius's*; with the dreadful Sentence of *Damnation*; most certain, inevitable, everlasting *Damnation*; upon every Soul of Man that doth not thoroughly believe it — *Vid. Candid Disquisitions. Appeal to the Common Sense of all Christian People, &c.*

But this *Assent* and *Consent*, which the Law requires of them, obliges not to the bare *Use* only (though to *use* Forms in Divine Worship which in one's Conscience are believed to be not agreeable to the Divine Will, and which are apprehended to give wrong and injurious Representations of the great Things of *Religion*, seems absolutely repugnant to that Reverence of the DEITY which is essential to his rational and acceptable Worship) but this *Assent* and *Consent*, I say, obliges not to a bare *Use* only (as the *Parliament* itself, after a solemn Debate expressly determined) but to an *Approbation*, as well as *Use*, of the Things contained in that Book. [f] Accordingly, they are not only to declare, but to subscribe with their Hands, That the *Common-Prayer-Book* contains nothing in it contrary to the Word of GOD. [g]

Now whether the *Clergy's* giving, in this solemn Manner, *unfeigned Assent and Consent* to Things, which, it is notorious, many, if not most, of the wisest and most serious greatly

[f] Vid. An Extract from the Journal of the House of Lords. *Calamy's Life of Baxter*; Vol. I. pag. 205. And second *Defence*, pag. 119.

[g] Canon XXXVI.

greatly *disapprove*, does at all magnify their *Character*; is for the Honour of *Christianity*; or of any service to the Cause of *Virtue* and *Truth*——rather, whether it has not had, and must not necessarily have, a contrary very *pernicious* and fatal Effect? — is with all Humility submitted to your Lordship's serious Consideration.

Infidelity gains Ground: loose and immoral Principles spread dangerously among all Ranks: *Foundations* seem to shake: The Generality of Mankind, glad to be set free from the Restraints of *Religion*, have an Ear always open to what can plausibly be said to weaken it's Authority, and to discredit *Revelation*. Should the Conduct of it's Ministers give Ground for strong Presumption, that, amidst all the Zeal and Solemnity of external Appearances, they think *lightly* of these Things themselves; and *subscribe* and *declare*, not according to the real Sense and Judgment of their own Mind, but as worldly Interest, or Party, or Perferment invite — What Wonder, my Lord, if Men of unsettled Principles, or of vicious and bad Hearts, catch greedily at the *Occasion*, and pour out all their Stores of Wit and Ridicule,

cule, of Contempt and Execration on them; rave with little Reserve against Priests and their Craft; call *Religion* a Cheat; and plunge into the deepest Horrors of *Scepticism* and *Infidelity*!

What Wonder, “ if it brings in such
 “ Diffoluteness and Contempt of Principle
 “ in the higher Part of the World (as his
 “ good Lordship above observes) and such
 “ profligate Intemperance and Fearlessness of
 “ committing Crimes, in the lower, as
 “ must, if this Torrent of Impiety stop
 “ not, become absolutely fatal.” Finally,
 what wonder, to hear the People trifling
 with *Damnation* and *mutual Curses* in the
 Streets, when *thirteen* Times a Year they
 hear their Leaders in Religion trifling (much
 worse than trifling) with them in their solemn
 Offices in the Church! It is certainly, my
 Lord, Matter of very serious Doubt, whether
 all the *Curses* and *Damnation*s, which are
 wantonly poured out by the Army, the
 Navy, and the lower Classes of Mankind,
 are really more offensive to *Almighty GOD*,
 or attended with greater Guilt, or more
 threaten to draw down divine Displeasure
 upon the Land, than *those* which are de-
 nounced

nounced solemnly by the standing *Order* of the CHURCH [a].

The unhappy *Divisions*, under which the *Christian* Church labours, the *Seets* and *Separations*, into which it is split, are, doubtless, to be considered as greatly prejudicial to the Cause of *Christianity*, and as another fatal Occasion of the Growth of *Infidelity*. May I be permitted, my Lord, to expostulate freely on this Head; and to enquire—whether your Lordship has not *here* also a great Deal to apprehend from the Trial of a future Day.

It is a Sentiment of great Weight, with which his Lordship of *London*, in his late excellent Sermons [b], presses *Unbelievers*, extremely applicable to the present Subject—“ *The Case* betwixt your Lordships, and
 “ those Fellow-Christians you reject, *must*
 “ *be once more argued before the Judgment*
 “ *Seat of GOD. Do you reject them because—*
 “ *Consider well. Is this a Reason that will*
 “ *justify you to the Face of GOD?*”

D

The

[a] Vid. Article IX. and XVIII. Canon. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8—And the Athanasian Creed,

[b] Discourse I. Page. 33.

The Power of *Ordination*, or of sending forth *Ministers* to officiate in the Christian Church, is considered as *a Trust* committed *solely* to your Lordships, by CHRIST the *supreme* PASTOR; committed to your Lordships, *exclusive* of all others; *A Trust*, my Lord, of a Nature extremely important: upon the right Discharge of which the Interest of that Church, which *he bath purchased with his own Blood*; its Instruction and Growth in Knowledge and Goodness, very greatly depends. *A Trust*, therefore, most surely, to be accounted for with great Strictness to Him the *supreme* PASTOR, from whom it was received.

But, suppose, my Lord, it should then be asked, as there is the highest Reason to apprehend it will be asked ——— “ How was it that
 “ you refused to commit *this Ministry* to any,
 “ but to those who would *subscribe* and *declare*
 “ *unfeigned Assent* to certain *Articles* and
 “ *Forms*, which you knew to be no *Doc-*
 “ *trines* nor *Parts* of my Religion! Had
 “ you Authority from GOD to put this Yoke
 “ upon the Neck of my Disciples, and thus
 “ *to limit* this Trust! Were you not con-
 “ vinced that by *this Limitation* you ex-
 “ cluded from the *Christian Ministry* many
 “ faithful

“ faithful and worthy Persons ; Men capable
 “ of great Service, and duely qualified for it,
 “ according to *my Law*, prescribed in the *Scripture Canon* ? — By what *Authority*, then,
 “ or by what *Law* did you deprive the *Christi-*
 “ *an Church* of the Ministrations of these
 “ Persons, and *them* of the Opportunity of
 “ ministring therein ?”

In that critical and awful Moment, my Lord, will it be sufficient to reply, (yet what else can be replied !) — It was by the Authority of the *Civil Magistrate*, and by the *Aët of Uniformity*, which commanded us *not to receive* them, to either the Christian *Ministry* or *Communion*, but upon Terms of their devising : in Obedience to *that Authority*, we rejected them from both —

With what a Look of Indignation will such a Plea be received by the surrounding Army of *Martyrs* ; who nobly sacrificed their Lives, rather than sacrifice their Conscience to the Authority of the *Civil Magistrate* ! And how severe a Frown must it draw from the Face of the JUDGE ! —

“ Did the *Civil Magistrate* die for you ?
 “ were you baptized into *his* Name ; or re-
 “ deemed by *his* Blood ? Can the *Civil Ma-*

“ *gistrate* now save you, or give you Admis-
 “ sion into the Kingdom of Heaven? He
 “ gave you, indeed, the Honours and Emolu-
 “ ments of *his* Kingdom: and for *these* you
 “ paid him Homage, the Homage of *Con-*
 “ *science*, by acknowledging *his* Authority to
 “ make Laws in *my* Kingdom; and by im-
 “ posing, at his Command, such Terms of
 “ Ordination, and of Communion in the
 “ Christian Sacraments, as I never enjoined:
 “ And thus to the notorious Impeachment
 “ of *my* Authority, to the Injury of *my*
 “ Disciples, and to the dividing of *my* Church,
 “ you publicly *rejected* those whom you
 “ knew, or might have known, that I ho-
 “ noured and received. And verily, *insomuch*
 “ as ye did it to *these* MY BRETHREN, ye
 “ did it unto me — Was it not my ex-
 “ press Command that you should *call no*
 “ *Man upon Earth*, MASTER; that you should
 “ acknowledge *no* Authority in Matters of
 “ Religion but that of JESUS CHRIST! Was
 “ not *this* Authority a Prerogative, a Glory,
 “ given in Reward of my meritorious Death?
 “ Is not *the* LAMB that was slain, and is not
 “ He ALONE, *worthy to receive this Honour*?
 “ But by submitting to *another* Sovereign in
 “ Things

“ Things pertaining to Religion, and en-
 “ forcing *his Laws* to the Exclusion of *my*
 “ *Servants* from the Christian Ministry and
 “ Church, to *that Sovereign* has your Alle-
 “ giance been unworthily transfered — See,
 “ if he can now reward the Homage you
 “ have paid him ! — Whoever *thus seeks to*
 “ (*πειθεω*) obey and please Men, he is not the
 “ *Servant of CHRIST: Gal. i. 10.*” —

The Brethren, my Lord, whom you
 reject, have lodged their Appeal before a *su-*
preme Court : *there* you are to appear with
 them, and the Cause is to be reheard — *Con-*
sider well : (to resume the Words of the good
 Bishop) *Are the Reasons* on which you now
 reject them *such as will be sufficient to justify*
you to the Face of GOD?

Being entered so far into this important
 Subject, will your Lordship permit me to
 advance a Step farther, and to observe —

That it is a mighty Prejudice, with some
 Men of Sense and Consideration, against
 CHRISTIANITY, that, as it stands exhibited
 in our *public Forms*, and the *Rituals* of the
 Church, it carries in it what they think, at
 least, what *Unbelievers* think, plain Marks
 of *Imposture* ; violent and strong *Suspensions*,
 that

that it could not possibly come from GOD. For it gives to all its Clergy such high and transcendent *Powers*, as a GOD of infinite Wisdom can never be supposed to give; *Powers*, which set the *Clergy* far above all *Kings* and *Potentates* of this World; which make it not the *Duty* only, but the *Interest* of Princes to bow down before them; and of the People to bring Presents, and to lick the Dust at their Feet.

CHRISTIANITY, my Lord, as it is professed and practised by your Lordship, imparts to all it's Bishops *a Power to give the HOLY GHOST*: and to all its Priests, through your Lordships Hands, it gives AUTHORITY *either to FORGIVE, or RETAIN the Sins* Men commit against the MAJESTY *and Laws of Heaven*. SIN, Divines have taught us, is ever to be considered as the greatest of all Evils; far more to be dreaded than Sicknefs, Poverty, Pain or Death. This appears to have been the general Sentiment of Mankind, in all Ages of the World. Accordingly, what Sacrifices have not Men made! what Penances submitted to! what Pilgrimages performed! to obtain *Forgiveness* of their Crimes;
readily

readily offering up, not Hecatombs of Beasts only and Rivers of Oyl, but even their own beloved Children, *the Fruit of their Body, for the Sin of their Soul*. Now this SIN, the Object of Men's so just and so direful Apprehension, there is not a *Priest* your Lordship ordains, but you give him *full Power and Authority* from GOD, even in the Name of the HOLY TRINITY, either *to forgive, or to retain*: And to *qualifie* him for so vast a Trust, that he may exert *properly* this important Power, (for which nothing less can suffice) you give him the HOLY GHOST.

Receive the HOLY GHOST — Whose Sins THOU dost forgive, they are forgiven: and whose Sins THOU dost retain, they are retained: in the Name of the FATHER, of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. Amen.

These are the *stupendous Powers*, my Lord, with which your Lordship invests, and sends forth into the World, *every Priest* you ordain. And in Consequence of *these Powers*, in the *Visitation of the Sick*, upon the Person's confessing, and desiring *Absolution*, the Priest is directed to pronounce, as from the Mouth of *Almighty GOD*, this solemn Sentence of REMISSION.

By.

By the AUTHORITY committed unto me, I ABSOLVE thee from ALL THY SINS; in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST.

The *Pope*, who is, I apprehend, the first *Clergyman* upon Earth who claims to himself this Power; and *from* and *through* whom all *Clergymen*, who assume it, must acknowledge it derived; his *Holiness*, I say, supposing him possessed of this Power, *most rightly* demands Homage of all secular *Potentates*, and declares himself PRINCE of all the *Kings of the Earth*: And all *Potentates* and *People*, who acknowledge this Power, *most rightly* pay the Ceremony of the Stirrup and the Slipper, and bow with Veneration before *their Lord God, the Pope*. [b]

But *this Power*, my Lord, which gives the *Pope* this Preheminence over all *Princes* (and which gives it *most justly*, if really possessed) is the *very same* (my Lord, I repeat it, the *very same*) which your Lordship declares yourself to give to *every Priest* you ordain. For the Power *to forgive* or *to retain* the Sins of Men, is the *very same* as to *have the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*; either to
open

[b] This Title he assumes, and it is publicly given him.

open or to shut its Gates. If therefore your Lordships, the *Bishops*, do, as you most solemnly profess, give this *transcendent Power*; you really constitute so many *Delegates* and high *Commissioners* from Heaven; and *authorise* them to dispense its *Pardons*, or its *Curses* amongst Men. And what Reverence or Revenue will any Man, who loves his Soul, think too great to be given to such Characters as these! [k]

But if THIS, my Lord, be *Christianity* — is it any Wonder that *Christianity* is ridiculed, is despised, is railed at, and reviled with very little Reserve? But is not THIS, my Lord, *Christianity* (I appeal to your Lordship's impartial Judgment, and to that of the whole World) is not THIS *Christianity*, as it stands exhibited in the public Forms, and in the constant Practice of a certain Church?

May I be permitted to add — But if to a Judgment of the greatest Candor there appears strong Reason to presume, that their

E Lordships

[k] This Doctrine, if believed by the Laity, ought to bring them at the Priests Feet; as the Ambassadors of *Palermo* at the Feet of Pope *Martin IV.* repeating thrice these Words — *Thou that takest away the Sins of the World, have Mercy upon us!*

Lordships, the Bishops of that Church, KNOW that they have no Power from *Almighty GOD* to give the *Holy Ghost*, at the very Time that they are professing, with great Solemnity, to give him; And, that they have no Authority from the *sacred Trinity* to invest the Priests they ordain with Ability *to forgive*, or *to retain* the Sins of Men, at the very Time that, in that *great NAME*, they are pretending to impart it to them; And finally, That the Priest, at the very Time that, in the Name of the HOLY TRINITY, he is *authoritatively* absolving a Man from the Guilt of ALL HIS SINS, knows in his own Conscience, that he has no Authority from GOD at all to absolve him from any *one Sin*; If to a Judgment of the greatest Candor, my Lord, there appears Reason thus to think — What Idea must Men form of *the RELIGION* of *such Actions* and *such Characters* as these! What Sentiments and Reflections must naturally arise, when one sees their *Lordships* stand forth, in the Presence of *Almighty GOD*, and before Angels and Men professing to confer Gifts, and to impart spiritual and transcendent Powers, if *conscious*, at the very Time, that the whole Solemnity is mere Parade,

and

and that they have no Ability at all to give them ! What marvel if, in the Indignation such a Sight must inspire, CHRISTIANITY be abhorred by Persons, already not prejudiced in its Favour, or at all kindly disposed to it ; and treated as an errant Cheat ; and its *Ministers* as Impostors, sent out with *Mock-Powers* to terrify, to delude, and to enslave the Souls of Men !

But *Christianity*, GOD be praised, *Scripture-Christianity* is quite free from this Reproach. A Power *to forgive* or *to retain Sins*, it gave only to the Twelve *Apostles*, the Founders of the Christian Church ; and, to qualify them for this Trust, they were actually *inspired* and *filled with the HOLY GHOST* ; they had the Gift of discerning Spirits ; could miraculously smite incorrigible Offenders with Diseases or Death, as they did *Elymas* the Sorcerer ; *Ananias* and *Sapphira* ; and thus *retained* or *bound* their Sins upon them : And they had Power also miraculously to cast out Devils, and to heal all Manner of Diseases, and thus *forgave* or *released* Men from the Penalty of their Sins.

But as *this Power*, since the *Apostolic Age*, is ceased, (by all Protestants *acknowledged* to

be ceased) from the Church ; and nothing but the *miraculous* Operation of the HOLY GHOST can possibly impart it, or qualify a Person for it ; How strange beyond Expression, that amidst the great Piety and Learning, which its keenest Adversaries must confess to subsist in the Church, a Pretension so *extravagant*, not to say *profane*, should still maintain a Place !

What adds, my Lord, exceedingly to the Strangeness of the Case, is ; that this Form of Ordaining Priests — “ *Receive the HOLY GHOST — Whose Sins thou forgiveest, they are forgiven and —* ” was never used, never known in the *Christian* Church for the first *Thousand* Years ; was never attempted to be introduced till the *Eleventh* or *Twelfth* Century : which every one knows to be a Period of the deepest Darkness, Stupidity and Oppression the Church ever felt.

Morinus, a learned Priest, [1] has published *Sixteen* of the most antient *Rituals*, or *Forms of Ordination* used in the Church, from the earliest Ages of Christianity in
which

[1] De Ordin. Sacr. See a Vindication of the Ordination of the Church of *England*, by Bishop *Burnet*. Printed 1688.

which any such are found. In the several Changes and Additions under which these Forms have successively past, is seen, how the Spirit of *Superstition* gradually wrought: Every Age adding some ridiculous Rite, or extravagant Claim, to the Inventions of the former, till it grew to the present enormous Mass in the *Roman Pontifical*.

But it is extremely observable, my Lord, that in not one of the first *Fifteen*, (from the *Fifth* to the *Twelfth* Century) doth the *Form* now used — “*Receive the HOLY GHOST, whose Sins &c.*” appear. It is in the *last* only, the *Sixteenth*, (which *Morinus* takes to be but about 300 years old) which assumes to itself *this Power*, yea amidst the Pride and Intoxication of this corruptest State of the Church, there seems to have so much Sense and Modesty remained, as to make it boggle at a Claim so extravagant as this: For the learned Priest observes, that in *two* other *Pontificals*, of the same Age, this Form — *Receive the HOLY GHOST, &c.* was not found.

And is this *extravagant Pretension*, my Lord, which the Church of *Rome*, amidst all its Pride and Wantonneſs of Superstition,
from

from the *Fifth* to the *Twelfth* Century, never presumed to make, now openly *avowed* and *adopted* by OUR Church ! This *Plant*, which sprung up from the most dreggy and polluted State which even the *Papacy* ever saw ; is it not only received into this enlightened, this reformed, this noble Part of the *Christian* Vineyard, but here suffered to take Root, to flourish greatly, and to grow ! May GOD in Mercy awaken a Spirit of Integrity and Fortitude in all whom it may concern : and wipe from the *Christian* Name the deep Scandal and Reproach it unrighteously suffers !

Is there no Room, my Lord, to apprehend the Displeasure of *Almighty* GOD at the representing CHRISTIANITY in so *injurious* a Light ? were the Men of *Bethshemeth* smitten with Death for looking presumptuously into the Ark ; [m] and *Uzza* for stretching out his Hand to support it ; [n] and *Ananias* and *Sapphira* for lying to the HOLY GHOST ? [o] And can the *Name* of GOD, and the *ever-blessed* TRINITY ; and the Doctrines, the Rites and Sacraments of CHRISTIANITY ; be trifled with, and profaned,

[m] 1 Sam. vi. 19. [n] 2 Sam. vi. 7. [o] Acts v. 5.

faned, and prostituted to Purposes of *worldly* Interest and Ambition, without Danger of *Divine* Resentment? Is there not a Time coming, when HEAVEN will *visit for these Things?* [p]

The *Signs of the Times* seems strongly to prognosticate some approaching great Events. *Christianity* is now passing a strict Examination: it shuns not, but invites the most critical Search. The Consequence of this Search, there is little Question, will be, that *Superstition* must totter; and that all Claims and Pretensions of a *spiritual* Kind, not founded on *Truth*, nor supported by *Right*, must fall before the *Axe laid at the Root*. But, whilst *the Tares are plucking up*, there is Danger lest the *Wheat be also destroyed with them*.

The

[p] It was the Complaint of the late excellent Bishop Burnet, (and are there many others, no doubt, of my Lords the Bishops who can sincerely make the same,) *that the EMBER WEEKS were the Burden and Grief of his Life*; and that the Things that he was *then* called to see and to perform, with Regard to the Candidates who came to be ordained, *did often tear his Heart, and pierced his Soul, and made him cry out, Oh that I had the Wings of a Dove!* *Pastoral Care. Preface to the third Edition.*

The *Freedom of Thinking* in which the *present* Age glories, is, indeed, dissipating apace the Charm of spiritual *Sorcery*, by which the Understandings and Consciences of the *former* were enthralled : But it is too natural to the human Mind to run into Extremes ; and having broke from the Chains of gloomy *Superstition*, to rush headlong into the Wilds of disconsolate *Infidelity*. Into those desolate Wilds Multitudes of all Ranks, both in high and low Life, are seen crouding with Haste. And it seems, my Lord, to require no *Spirit of Prophecy* to say — *WHITHER these Things tend ! and what their End will be !* A small Degree of Foresight seems sufficient to see, that they hastily and directly tend to the utter Demolition, not only of the present *ecclesiastical* System, but of all *established* Forms and Offices of Religion ; — That the *sceptical* and *loose* Principles which spread through the Land are the dangerous Artillery, which *the Enemy* is playing upon the *High-places* and the *Strong-holds* of the Church ; that, therefore, Prudence strongly dictates, that we not only *desert*, but *level*, what are called the Outworks, which we know to be

be *untenable*; and call in every *friendly Hand*, to unite as one Body, in the common Defence.

It was, perhaps, with little less than a *prophetic Spirit* that a very learned and worthy *Prelate* has lately expressed his Wish, “ That something was done to convince the
“ World, that the Clergy of the Church are
“ not averse to a *Reformation* of some Parts
“ of her *Public Service*: Since, otherwise,
“ they may give Offence by their *Obstinacy*
“ and seeming *Infallibility*; and if a Storm
“ should arise, may run a *Risque* of having
“ the Tree torn up by the Roots, which they
“ might have saved by a little *Pruning*.” [p]

The Period, my Lord, seems near approaching, in which *the Angel is commanded to thrust in his sharp Sickle, and to gather the Clusters of the Vine of the Earth* (i. e. of the mundane or worldly CHURCH) *because her Grapes are fully ripe*. [q] A Disposition seems moving in all Nations around us, in Nations where it could least be expected to appear, to scrutinize and retrench the exorbitant Claims and Revenues of *the CHURCH*;
B and

[p] Essay on Spirit, *Preface* pag. 53. [q] Revel.
xiv. 14.

and to demand some of the immense superfluous Wealth of that opulent *Ally* for the pressing Exigences of *the* STATE. And if in Countries where *Popery* reigns, in all its Rigor, these Retrenchments are made ; what may not justly be expected in ANOTHER, where *Dissoluteness and Want of Principle* (as the pious Bishop above observes) spreads widely amongst *the higher Ranks* ; whilst *the lower* are divided into numerous Sects, not zealously attached to the Pomp of the established Worship ; and whilst the Emissaries from *Rome* are seducing *Thousands* into their Tents ; all whose Power and Cunning will be exerted to the utmost, on the least inviting Occasion, to demolish *the* FORTRESS, whose Artillery hath severely galled them, and upon whose Ruins they hope to raise their *exploded Superstition* to its antient Grandeur again.

Is there any more likely Way to procure a *Lengthening of Tranquility* than, as the Prophet advises, *to break off Iniquity by Righteousness* : to correct Mistakes ; to supply Deficiencies ; to remove *the Rocks* upon which the Integrity of *Thousands* hath been miserably wrecked ; to demolish separating Walls ; and to extend the Arms of the
Church,

Church, as wide as those of CHRIST and the *Apostles* were extended. That Church *alone* which is built upon this catholic and wide Bottom is like to stand firm, and to sustain the shock of rising Storms.

Having trespassed, I fear, too far upon your Lordship's Patience already, I add no more at present — But that as your Lordship has the Glory of standing in the first Rank of the Defenders of our *holy Faith*; and with irresistible Force hath pleaded the Cause of CHRISTIANITY against its avowed Enemies; so there is a Service yet behind, to which GOD, and your *Country*, and the Interest of *Religion* seem loudly to call you forth. CHRISTIANITY, my Lord, lies bleeding of Wounds it hath received *in the House of its Friends*; wounds by far the most dangerous of any it suffers: There are few Persons living more able than your Lordship to close up these Wounds, and to apply an healing Hand. The high Reverence and Esteem in which your Lordship is justly held by all Ranks of the *Clergy* will give a Weight and Success to any salutary Counsels your Lordship may propose, not so easy to be obtained from any other Quarter. Through
the

the Favour of Heaven, we are blessed with a Government, which, there is Reason to believe, needs but to be petitioned by those who have the Administration of *spiritual Affairs* to ease them of any Grievances, to supply any Defects, and to alter or reform whatever in the present System may need to be reformed.

That your Lordship may have the unspeakable Satisfaction in Life, the Consolation at Death, and the Glory in a future State of having exerted with all the Resolution and Zeal of a *Christian Bishop* the great Power GOD hath given you — That when your Lordship shall soon stand (as it must, my Lord, be *very soon*) before the *supreme PASTOR*, to render an Account of your high Station in his Church, it may appear to your everlasting Honour, that you were ready, not to *risque* only, but even to *sacrifice* every worldly Interest, to rescue the *Christian Name* from the Reproach you saw it suffer — Prays with great Sincerity

Your Lordship's

most obedient, &c.

A CHRISTIAN.









